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ABSTRACT

This paper emphasizes the importance of classroom discipline and offers suggestions that may be helpful to teachers facing behavior problems. Proceeding on the assumption that pupils who disrupt the classroom must be taught discipline, the author discusses ways of modifying the classroom environment and suggests ways to direct and encourage pupils to acceptable behavior. First of all, each day's activities should be "overplanned" since many discipline problems develop because students have nothing to do. The schedule of activities should be varied with a diversity of instructional approaches, thus avoiding boredom. Activities, however, should be highly organized. Firmness and kindness on the part of the teacher is important. Courtesy and genuine interest in each student will bring positive reactions while threatening is, for the most part, futile. In many classroom discipline problems, teachers make the mistake of over-reacting. Calmness is the teacher's best reaction when faced with disruptive behavior. If all else fails in difficult classroom situations over a period of time, the teacher should not hesitate to ask for help from the principal, counselor, fellow teachers or parents. Finally, it is suggested that teaching discipline in a systematic, organized manner may well be the teacher's most important responsibility, because it is the disciplined product of the educational system who will likely make the greatest contribution to our future society. (JD)

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LET'S PUT CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE BACK IN THE BASICS

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LET'S PUT CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE BACK IN THE BASICS

The "back to the basics" reform movement in public school education is currently receiving much publicity. Schools are conducting self-assessments to examine the curriculum, providing in-service workshops to "recycle" and "renew" teacher competencies, revising educational materials, and taking other steps to ensure that emphasis is being placed on instruction in the fundamentals of reading, spelling, grammar, writing, speaking, and computation in mathematics.

However, in many instances, educators are ignoring the most basic item in any "back to the basics" program: classroom discipline. Many teachers agree that the major problem in today's classroom is a general lack of student discipline. All organized learning activities require effective classroom management.

Teacher training institutions provide little, if any, formal instruction in classroom discipline techniques for the pre-service teacher. Theoritical knowledge of child behavior and classroom management principles are presented but few practical classroom situations with possible solutions are provided. Thus, the beginning teacher encounters the world of the classroom without the discipline tools necessary to establish a positive learning environment.

Likewise, the experienced teacher feels a similar need for help. Many students of today's society experience difficulty in adjusting to the organized classroom routine. Teachers do not command the respect of their students as the teacher's authority in the classroom is being constantly questioned. As the pressure builds on the teacher to emphasize the "basics" in a classroom abounding with discipline problems, both experienced and beginning teachers become frustrated.

The situation, however, is not hopeless. Teachers who are really interested in solving their classroom discipline problems will find the following principles helpful:

1. Teach discipline

2. Overplan
3. Provide a varied schedule with varied teaching methods
4. Be organized
5. Be firm and kind
6. Be consistent
7. Do not threaten
8. Try behavior modification
9. Do not overreact
10. Seek help

Most teachers assume that pupils know "how to act" in the school classroom. In many cases this is a false assumption. A student from a disorderly home environment develops a behavior pattern which causes conflict when exercised in the disciplined routine of the classroom. Teachers must realize, therefore, that a different set of behavior patterns must be presented to students. In other words, discipline must be taught.

As with any new concept, immediate results will not necessarily be forthcoming. A systematic, organized plan is necessary for teaching discipline just as with teaching such "basics" as reading, spelling, and computation. However, discipline is not taught in isolation. It must be a part of all activities. There are certain principles that, when followed, can be of valuable assistance to the teacher who is trying to establish a disciplined classroom.

First of all, each day's activities should be "overplanned". Many discipline problems develop simply because the students have nothing to do or complete their assigned studies prior to the end of an established class time. It is the teacher's responsibility to plan worthwhile activities keeping the time factor in mind. There is nothing educationally wrong with planning more assignments than the students can complete in a given amount of time. It is not necessary that the total assignment be given in one dose; rather, the teacher should always have another activity for concept reinforcement or extension ready for students.

To be effective, the above mentioned "overplanning" must be built around a varied schedule of activities including a diversity of instructional approaches. Students get bored with doing the same activity while using the same method for ten

months of the school year. While it is true that students need a routine to follow too much repetition leads to boredom which in turn leads to students channeling their energies toward unacceptable classroom activities. For the self-contained elementary school classroom teacher, there is really no justification for teaching spelling at 9:00 a.m. every morning from August until June. In the same manner, the secondary teacher who always assigns the next chapter in the text to be read tonight and discussed tomorrow is unconsciously creating a pattern which invites undesirable classroom behavior. The motto should be "keep them guessing" as to what will come next.

The flexible schedule of activities should include a variety of instructional methods. Teaching-learning situations must be changed periodically in order to maintain a high level of student interest. Large group instruction, small group interaction, lecture, discussion, one-to-one instruction, peer-tutoring should be interspersed with learning centers, modules, contracts, individual and group projects, field trips, and resource speakers.

All activities, no matter what the degree of variety present, must be highly organized. Students recognize lack of preparation and in turn lose respect for the teacher's ability to present any lesson. Therefore, all needed materials must be at hand and a detailed step-by-step procedure must be developed by the teacher for each learning situation.

Another principle of effective classroom discipline is firmness and kindness on the part of the teacher. Most students expect the teacher to be firm. While rules can be cooperatively developed by the teacher and the class members, it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that the adopted rules are enforced. A teacher who is strict and kind commands more respect than the teacher who is concerned about popularity with the students. Kindness is evident on the teacher's part in the genuine interest and concern shown for each student, in being fair to all students, and in using two well known phrases: "please" and "thank you." In many

instances, students never hear these two phrases in their home environments. In usage, the teacher indicates sincere request for and sincere pleasure in positive student behavior.

Several studies conducted among secondary school students regarding negative teacher characteristics indicate that inconsistency by the teacher is usually among the most often mentioned. Teacher inconsistency of action confuses students and causes them to lose faith in the teacher as a professional and as a person. Teachers must internalize a set of professional traits that are constant. Thus, classroom standards of acceptable and unacceptable behavior will emerge and students will know the limits in which they may operate.

Some teachers spend too much class time making threats to students. Idle threats are soon ignored as students realize that the teacher is not really planning on following through with the intimidation. Telling students time and again that they will be punished for misbehavior by being restricted, having extra classwork assigned, or being "sent" to the principal is a waste of time.

Instead of threats, a possible approach for the teacher is the use of behavior modification. Adopt a policy of rewarding positive behavior. Points, check marks stars, poker chips, etc. can be exchanged for worthwhile privileges. As students channel their energies toward acceptable goals, negative classroom behavior will subside.

In many daily classroom discipline problems, teachers make the mistake of overreacting. Misbehavior situations such as small talk in the classroom usually originate within the pupil who is craving attention. Overreaction by the teacher focuses the attention of the entire class upon that student and he has thus "won" the little game. Calmness is the teacher's best reaction when faced with minor day-to-day discipline problems. Yelling at students does not accomplish any permanent results. The class may temporarily become quiet but soon the noise is at a higher level requiring a louder outburst from the teacher. Calm alternatives to minor situations

include flipping the lights on and off, ringing a small bell-hop bell, staring quietly and firmly at the class, and voiding rewards earned previously.

If all else fails in disruptive class situations over an extended period of time, the teacher should seek help from others. The principal, counselor, school nurse, fellow teachers, and parents are sources of assistance to provide suggestions. Also, the mature students in a class of older students may have worthwhile ideas.

Finally, it is suggested that classroom teachers keep in mind that they are professionals charged with the responsibility of teaching the "basics" in education. Teaching discipline in a systematic, organized manner may well be the teacher's most important responsibility because it is the disciplined product of our educational system who will likely make the greatest contribution to our future society.